

John, Saint, The Apostle, (Church of, at Hackney,

k

A

7

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

HACKNEY CHURCH,

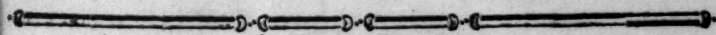
ON

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4th, 1780,

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

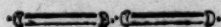
G E N E R A L F A S T.

(Published at the Request of the Congregation.)



L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR CHARLES DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.



M D C C L X X X.

S. E. R. M. O. N.

PRINTED IN

HARVARD CHURCH

ON

AND A. R. Y. 1880



THE LIBRARY FOR A

GENERAL EAST

(Printed in the year of the Centenary)

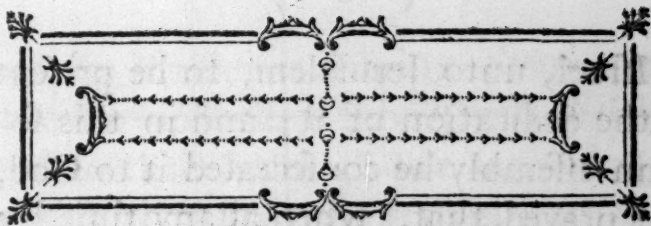
L O N D O N

PRINTED FOR THE CHURCH OF THE TRINITY

M. O. L. X. X.

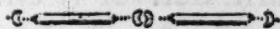
TH E Reader will want no proof that the following Sermon was not written for publication. With what reluctance the preacher does publish it, his friends, at whose desire it is done, will do him the justice to acknowledge. They know how well convinced he is, that it is of too little importance, and too hastily written, to have any claim to the notice of the public ; and that though from the pulpit it might satisfy the indulgent expectations of those who know the little time which the duties of his station leave him for correct productions, from the press it can come under no such allowances. He wishes his objections had had their weight. It is however both his disposition and his duty to comply with the wishes

of those whose favours and friendship have a claim to every attention on his part that can give them pleasure. However painful in other respects the publication of it is, it affords him one satisfaction, in the opportunity which it gives him to profess his regard and gratitude to the parish of *Hackney*.



A

SERMON, &c.



2 CHRONICLES VII. 14.

IF MY PEOPLE WHICH ARE CALLED BY
MY NAME SHALL HUMBLE THEM-
SELVES, AND PRAY, AND SEEK MY
FACE, AND TURN FROM THEIR
WICKED WAYS, THEN WILL I HEAR
FROM HEAVEN, AND WILL FORGIVE
THEIR SIN, AND WILL HEAL THEIR
LAND.

WHEN Solomon had finished his
temple, he assembled the elders
of Israel and all the heads of the tribes,
the chief of the fathers of the children

of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to be present at the dedication of it; and in this solemn assembly he consecrated it to God, and prayed that, when at any time his people should be afflicted with the calamities of war, pestilence, or any kind of national distress, and should come to this temple, forsaking and imploring the pardon of their sins, he would hear their prayer and deliver them from their distress.

“ If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee towards this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.” 2 *Chron.* vi. 34.

“ If thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication before thee in this house; then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people

people Israel, and bring them again into the land which thou gavest to them, and to their fathers," ver. 24.

" If they sin against thee, and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near: yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, we have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly: if they return to thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray towards their land which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee," ver. 36.

In answer to this prayer, God appeared to Solomon, and told him that he had heard and granted it.

“ I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people: if my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” chap. vii. ver. 12.

We have here the direction that should guide us, and the hope that must support us, in times of public danger or distress. On the present occasion I do not know where I could better direct you for the cause of our calamities, or the means of our relief.

That we may have confidence in the means prescribed, it may be proper to premise, in confirmation of the cause, how fit it is that the vices of a people should be punished and restrained.

That

That God, in whose power, and at whose disposal every part of nature is, can, if he please, correct or punish a sinful people, none I presume will venture to dispute. Why he should do it perhaps may not be quite so obvious.

It will be said that this is not the world in which we are to expect the rewards of virtue, or the punishment of vice. With individuals it certainly is not. Virtue is not without its advantages, nor vice without its inconveniences in the present life; but these are not the certain consequences of either: we are to look beyond the present life, where virtue will be sure of its full reward, and vice as certain of its punishment. With such a prospect of future recompence, the vices of individuals may go unpunished, and their virtues unrewarded here, without reflecting upon the wisdom or the justice of the power that rules the world. Were he to reward or punish in the present life, he would have to suspend and alter the course of nature; to stop the natural

tural effects of causes; to work continual miracles; without an adequate occasion.

The case is different with the vices of a people. When wickedness no longer confines itself to individuals, but overspreads a country, and threatens to become universal, it is time for God to interfere. There is then an adequate occasion for it. And it is necessary he should do it. As individuals, each one's vices would be sufficiently recompensed in another life: But as a community overspread with wickedness, a more immediate remedy is required: else would virtue be quite extinct: The few that should remain untainted, amidst the general corruption, would not be able to escape infection,—they would sink, by degrees, into the vices of their country, and there would at length be no such thing as virtue left. It is necessary therefore to the very existence of virtue, that the vices of a people should be restrained. They are not like the vices
of

of individuals, of no concern but to themselves; or, like them, to be counteracted by the virtues of others. The vices of a nation entail corruption on posterity, and leave no remaining virtue to counteract their influence.

It is fit, perhaps, that God should interpose before the evil become so universal. The wickedness of a people may not have reached its full maturity, and the cause of virtue may not be threatened with immediate danger; but it may yet be necessary to punish and restrain it. It may be greater than the limits of justice or mercy can admit. In compassion, however, to the virtuous, and to sinners too, a sufficient cause for its correction and restraint appears. In times of public depravity, virtuous characters are beset with difficulties and temptations that might be too much for them if God were not to appear on the side of virtue, to encourage and support them.

And in mercy to the sinful people, to stop their further progress in iniquity,

quity, and to reclaim and bring them back to virtue, we see an obvious reason for divine correction.

When they are lifted up with their prosperity; when their minds are corrupted; their affections alienated; their iniquities too deeply rooted to be otherwise removed; it is time for mercy, if not for justice, to interpose. In this respect, it is with nations as it is with individuals: God does not punish, but he wishes to reclaim them. This is the design and the effect of personal afflictions: and those of a people tend alike to reform the country that is become too generally corrupt for individual admonition.

Mild perhaps and gentle are the first corrections, and previous admonitions which they have: but when these are not effectual; when the evil is become inveterate, punishment succeeds correction: the sinful people are given up to disorder, to famine, or the sword. Their vices are perhaps the instruments of their punishment; the means
by

by which infinite wisdom effects the purposes of his providence, and brings about their correction or their ruin. Hence come civil discords and convulsions. Hence come wars; too calamitous in themselves! but which he who ruleth the events of war can make calamitous indeed.

Proofs in plenty might be produced in confirmation of what has been advanced: but this would take up time which we shall employ to more advantage in recollecting the sins which are the probable cause of our own misfortunes.

In the recollection of these, I know not where I can begin with more propriety than where perhaps our distresses originate—that proud confidence in our own strength; that ingratitude which had forgot the source of all our blessings; that presumption which had ascribed them, not to him by whom we were enabled to be what we were, but to ourselves; the policy, the spirit, and the resources of ourselves. Too like
the

the ungrateful sons of Israel, "we remembered not the Lord our God who had delivered us from the hand of all our enemies on every side," *Judges* viii. 34.

Puffed up with our successes ; raised by these successes to the highest pitch of glory and of greatness, we were intoxicated ; we fancied ourselves something more than men. Proud and presumptuous, we bid defiance to every earthly power ; and we seemed to think ourselves independant of the divine. It was fit therefore that we should be humbled ; that we should be taught the vanity of human strength, and feel the effects of trusting to it : that, sure and certain as the events of human policy may seem, we should be convinced that there is a power above us who can frustrate the wisest councils, and defeat the best concerted plans : that we should be brought to own our weakness, and see on whom we have to trust : to ascribe our blessings to their proper cause, and look for favour to its only source.

In our private circumstances we were little less in need of God's correcting hand. Individuals had derived, from the prosperity of their country, prosperity to themselves, and they had forgot to whom they were indebted for it. "They trusted in their wealth, and boasted themselves in the multitude of their riches," *Psalms* xlix. 6. They did indeed "make gold their hope, and say unto the fine gold, thou art our confidence," *Job* xxxi. 24. "They said in their hearts we shall never be moved; we shall never be in adversity," *Psalms* x. 6.

It was therefore time to humble them: to let them know that the riches in which they trusted, are not the sure and permanent possessions which they thought them: that they are not so independent as they seemed: that he who gave can take away; can sink the value of their wealth, or at once deprive them of it; can reduce them, from the proudest affluence, to a state of visible dependence on his providential pleasure.

In our prosperity we were not only lifted up to a proud independence, I
had

had almost said contempt of providence, but we were become regardless of our duty, and insensible of our interest. Possessed of so much present happiness, plenty, peace, and all their train of blessings, the prospects of future life had nothing to invite us. With careless unconcern, with levity, and perhaps without much faith, we heard the admonitions of a world to come. In the enjoyment of our present blessings the prospect, the desire of future ones was lost. Hence, that want of piety, of zeal, of faith; the characteristic vices of the age:—The worship of God, in public and in private, shamefully neglected:—The day set apart for religious uses, converted into a day of pleasure.—Every means of spiritual improvement treated with levity and contempt:—and a spirit of infidelity every day increasing.

An enlightened age we called it; and the religion of the gospel was not enough refined to suit it. Alas! it was a corrupted one; and the truths of the gospel were too plain and pure to please it.

In

In times less enlightened, but, in this respect however, possessed of all the lights that we can have to direct our faith, the doctrines of the gospel were firmly believed, and zealously professed: they were preached with simplicity, and heard with gladness: the scriptures that contain them were highly valued, and they were eagerly perused: But now, our faith is wavering, and our zeal grown cold: The scriptures are thrown aside, and they who preach the truths of scripture are heard with unwilling attention, and with visible dislike. To suit the taste of an enlightened age its precepts must be softened, its doctrines refined.

Such our faith—Our practice not much better. One sad instance of our depravity, is the luxury and love of pleasure that prevail among us. Other ages may have been distinguished by some excesses and extravagances more offensive than the vices and follies that are now in fashion; but I know of none more uni-

B

versally

versally given up to dissipation. We are perhaps somewhat better than we were; taught by our misfortunes, or compelled by our necessities to be so. But the love of pleasure seems still to have absorbed our best affections: it hath absorbed our regard to a future state; our piety to God; our love of virtue; the love of our country; and almost all affection between the nearest relatives and friends.

I do not mention many other of our vices, because they are not peculiar to the present, but common to every age. Fertile enough, God knows, it is of every vice, but our pride and ingratitude, our profaneness and infidelity, our inordinate love of worldly pleasures, are the crying sins of our country, and for these, as we have now with humility confessed, if God should enter into judgement with us, he might justly inflict upon us the severity of his wrath, and deliver us up to the insults and reproaches of our enemies.

I trust our hearts have gone in concert with the confession we have made.

For

For indeed, with grief and shame I speak it, we are the sinful people we have acknowledged. The sketch you have beheld will shew it: and you have beheld the outlines only of our vices. Too well your own reflections will supply what I have left unfinished.—

Consider these—recollect our many other common provocations——and say if we have not deserved correction. When we were grown proud and insolent; independant of providence, and regardless of God: when the very form of godliness was fast decaying; the spirit of it well nigh gone: when our zeal was cold and languid; our faith weak and wavering: when the doctrines of the gospel were slighted and rejected; its duties despised and ridiculed; its interests little if at all regarded: when nothing but sensual objects had any power to please us; nothing but luxury and a love of pleasure prevailed among us; nothing but dissipation was to be seen in all our dwellings; was it not time that God should visit us? Could he

suffer so much wickedness to go unnoticed? No: virtue, expiring virtue, called for vengeance: and he hath begun to execute it: we have already felt the hand of his displeasure; and how much farther we may feel it he alone can tell. Calamitous enough our present situation is; but unless we forsake our sins, and turn from our wicked ways, it may be worse; they may bring upon us greater evils yet.

There are some perhaps who deride the idea of divine displeasure, and, what is still more strange, the existence of the evils we are met to deprecate. The politician who sits at home, secure from the dangers, a stranger to the hardships, and exempt or but a little sufferer from the burdens of it, does not consider war in the calamitous light in which the Christian sees it. He sits at ease, and reads and talks of victories obtained without a spark of pity for the thousands that have fallen, and the thousands that are left to lament their fall; without a single thought of all the miseries and distresses that they carry with them.

Not

Not so the Christian, or indeed the citizen who regards his country's good. He considers war at any time, and under any circumstances, as a calamity greatly to be deplored. He feels as a Christian and fellow creature ought to feel, for the unhappy people who are exposed to the horrors of it; for the brave and valuable men who fall on either side; for the relatives and friends who are left to deplore their loss: he feels as the good citizen must feel, for his country's loss, in the loss of so much strength, so many valuable members of the community: he considers the distresses which commerce suffers: and, what is an evil of a more lasting nature, he considers, (he would be a poor citizen if he did not consider), the burdens which the expences of it bring upon his country; he considers these, and many more, which are the constant calamities of war, and knows they will be ill repaid, whatever the event may be.

The feelings of my hearers will allow me to pass in silent sorrow over the difficulties and distresses peculiar to the war in which we are now involved. Too well you know and feel them. What the causes that have concurred to bring us into this unhappy state, is little to our present purpose to enquire. Better will it become the minister of peace to heal, than to enlarge your wounds. Better will it become me to speak comfort and instruction to your minds, than inflame your feelings, or waste your time in reflections that can be of no advantage to you.

Suffer me then to give you, with freedom and sincerity, a few words of consolation and advice.

To you who know and feel the distresses of your country I speak. They who do not know their misery, want no consolation, and they would despise advice.

The existence of our calamities you feel and lament. To whom you impute them is, in this case at least, of little conse-

consequence. So circumstanced we are: and it is the duty and the wish of every friend to his country, whatever his principles or opinions be, to do his utmost to remove its present evils, and avert the greater ones that threaten.

Let us then (and surely at such a time, and for such a purpose, we may do it) let us divest ourselves of party prejudice, and unite our endeavours to this truly patriotic end.

Men of principle, they whose views and wishes are to their country's good, whatever measures they espouse, will give me leave to point out one, not less necessary than any which they wish to see adopted; and which can have no respect to party, and will surely not obstruct, if it doth not promote the success of others.

In the vices of our country, a too sufficient cause of divine displeasure will be found, and while that exists, success is not to be expected. Others not so distant, may seem the causes of our misfortunes; the want of wisdom, or

the want of virtue in our councils. Some may think they see it in the divisions and contentions among ourselves. Be it so. Be it either, or be they both, these are but second causes which a superior power can make subservient to his will, and employ as the instruments of our correction. If our vices have deserved it: if it were necessary to humble and correct us, these were means in the hand of providence to effect it. It is necessary we have seen, and it is usual we know for the vices of a people to be punished and restrained: and vices like ours were too glaring to go unpunished. In the present distresses of our country, there is something of divine displeasure to be seen. The cause we must remove. We must forsake our sins, and become the people that God can serve. Do this, and it will be happy for us that we have suffered as we have. The end of our afflictions will be obtained: and till then, relief is not to be desired.

We may exult in the moment of success,

cess, but if God be not our friend, vain will be every effort we can make in policy or strength. Think not I mean to speak with contempt of these. Far from it. The best exertions of strength and wisdom too are more than ever necessary. Wisdom in our councils, spirit and unanimity among ourselves, and a more zealous and disinterested regard in each to our country's good, are the means which, under providence, must protect and save us: but these without the co-operating aid of providence will not do it. God can defeat our strongest efforts, and frustrate our best designs. The minds of men and the elements of nature are at his disposal. The winds and the sea obey him. What then can all our policy or strength effect if he be not our friend? What can fleets and armies do if he be pleased to interpose against us.

Make him our friend: become the people that he can take into his protection, and we need not fear what all the united powers of Europe or the world

world, can do. Unallied with every other power, his alliance will be sufficient for us.

If we want faith, read what he hath done for those who have sought his favour, and put themselves under his protection. One instance will be sufficient.

A people are threatened by combined and numerous armies,—they are sensible of their want of power to withstand them, and their fears direct them to the only power that can protect them. To him they make their supplication: in him they put their trust. A solemn fast is proclaimed,—the people from every part gather themselves together to seek the Lord, and implore his aid: “All Judah stand before him with their little ones, their wives and their children.” They pray: they invoke him as the source of power and might, as the God of their fathers, and the friend of Israel: they look with hope and confidence to the mercy which had saved them in
times

times past, and to the gracious promise of his aid in every time of need. "We have no might, say they, against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee," upon that God who can and will protect the people who put their trust in him. Read the chapter from which I take it*, and you will see he can.

This one instance is enough to confirm the faith, and raise the hope of those who know the power, and believe the promises of God. There are some, I know, whom all the instances I could bring together would only harden in their unbelief. All the experience they have had has not been able to convince them how little human policy and strength can do. The faith and hope that look to heaven for success they still deride, trusting to their own wisdom, and relying on their own strength,

* 2 Chron. xx. appointed for one of the lessons of this day.

with

with that same proud confidence which has well nigh been our ruin.

With such I am not disposed to reason. They may deride our faith, and scoff at the steps we take to seek relief. The pious mind knows whence his relief must come, and will embrace with joy the opportunity which he has to seek it. With humility, with deep felt sorrow, and with sincerity of intention to amend, he will implore the mercy and the help he stands in need of.

Be this our case. The sins of each will afford him ample matter of humility and grief; and his amendment will be well rewarded if it conduce but to his own advantage. But it will contribute to his country's good.

Say not my reformation can be of little consequence. It is of much. The vices of individuals have made up the general depravity: Their reformation must make the reformation of their country. Each must do his part. There is not one among us but may contribute something to his country's good.

Other

Other aids many of us may not be able to contribute; but this all can do. No one's life is so reformed but that there remains much that he yet may do: and no one's reformation is so contemptible but that it will weigh something in the scale of public good.

We cannot effect a general reformation. I know it; but we can do our part towards it: and it perhaps may be that for a few individuals; few in comparison with the many who are lost to every sense of virtue and of interest, our country may be saved in the day of its distress. The idea is not romantic: scripture gives us hope; and this country is itself a proof of what may be expected.

We of this nation are the last people upon earth that should want confidence in God. The many wonderful deliverances we have had; the successes we have obtained; the exalted rank we have maintained among the nations of the earth, "little as we are among the thousands of Judah," are the strongest proofs of a providence,
that

that will protect the people who put their trust in him.

Would we now do so, and become the virtuous people that can expect it. I have not a doubt, I have the fullest confidence, that we again should be the favoured people we have been.

Be then this our resolution. Let us, here in the presence of the Almighty, enter into a strict confederacy against the vices of our country. Let the heart of every Christian here assembled subscribe to the resolution, that we will renounce our sins, and in our several stations put in practice the virtues that we profess.

This, my friends and brethren, is at every time the duty of us all. Our individual interest depends upon it. But our country now requires it of us. We are engaged, let us remember, in an arduous contest. We have more than usual difficulties to encounter. All the united strength of the nation, unassisted from above, will not be able to surmount them. Engaged in such a contest, surrounded with such difficulties,
it

it is more than ordinarily needful to make God our friend. But will he, can he be our friend while we continue the sinful people that we are? He certainly will not, he cannot do it. He will rather leave us to ourselves, or as a further punishment for our sins, “ deliver us up to the insults and reproaches of the enemy.”

But if we forsake our sins, and become a virtuous people, we may be again a favourite and a happy people. We shall make a friend in God; and he by various means can prosper and accomplish the work we have in hand: he can by uniting us, or dividing those who contend against us; by weakening their hands, or strengthening ours; by prospering our designs, or by defeating theirs; or, what is more devoutly to be wished than every success in war, by disposing the hearts of both to mutual love and peace, bring our contest to a speedy and a happy issue.

Of

Of this be well assured, that "if we humble ourselves, and pray, and seek his face, and turn from our wicked ways, he will hear from heaven, and will forgive our sin, and will, *some way or other*, heal our land."

F I N I S.